

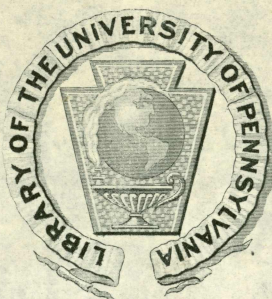
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*J. W. Harshberger.*

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# THE ENGLISH SPIRIT.

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER TO  
A NEUTRAL.

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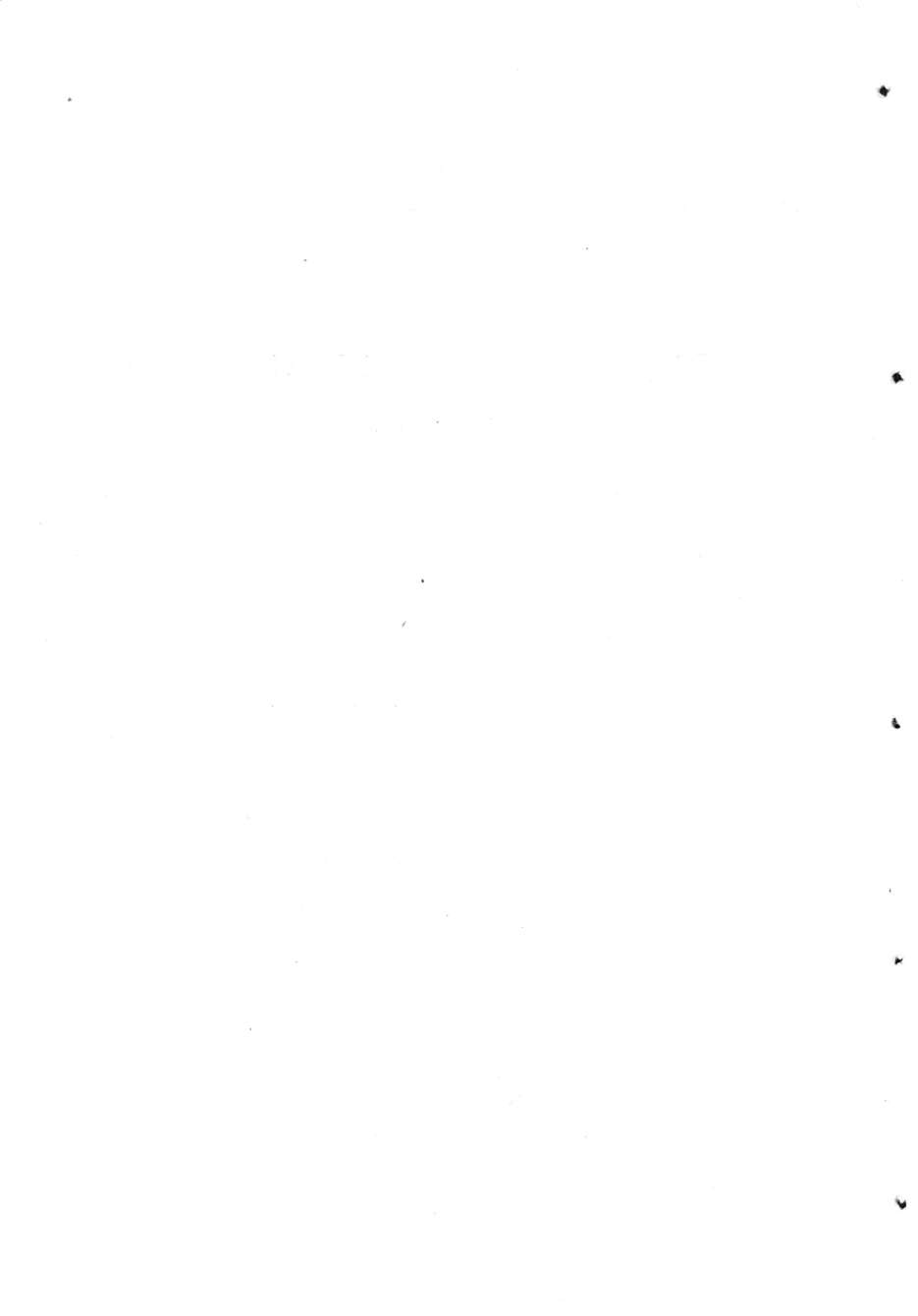
By an ENGLISHMAN.

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# THE ENGLISH SPIRIT.

Extract from a Letter to a Neutral.

By an ENGLISHMAN.

" . . . The past year-and-a-half of war has been for me a remarkable revelation of the English character. I confess that I fancied I was familiar with the English spirit and knew what the average Englishman was likely to think and do in any given circumstances. But I must equally confess that I had not realized, before the war, the true strength of the English character. I had not fully appreciated those elements in it which, in my opinion, render the English people invincible and explain the shock which their unexpected entry into the war caused to the German Imperial Chancellor.

" I write you these lines because, to my mind, after the acceptance of official neutrality, the next best thing for a neutral and an honest man

(7384—8.)

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war etc. - qt. Brit.  
qt. Brit. - Hist. - war etc

is a knowledge of the truth, whether it prove agreeable or disagreeable to his personal predilections. I am not here primarily addressing those whose commercial interests lead them to try to make money wherever they can. Subject to the rules of international law and the regulations made by his own Government, there is nothing illegal in a neutral's trading with belligerents on either side, just as there is nothing illegal in action taken by belligerents on either side to interfere with the passage of goods which they have reason to believe are likely to reach and benefit the enemy. Traders may complain, but neutrals are apt to forget that war is war and that, instead of complaining, they ought to rejoice that they are not involved in it. You suffer inconvenience, it is true. What you do not realize are the miseries which you escape. I will go further and remind you of the prosperity which, in many instances, the legitimate supply of your commodities, in unprecedented quantities, to the belligerents has brought you. You, personally, may not have made the money, but the money has been made, it is circulating in the country, and there are few who are not feeling the benefit of it.



“I wish, rather, to explain, for the benefit of neutrals who are also students of the newspapers and intelligent observers of events, some of the points on which, if they do *not* know England intimately, they are likely to form a wrong impression from what they read about her. I am not speaking of the information which comes in such abundance from hostile sources. You all know, from personal experience, the flood of German propagandist literature which, even from a period before the war, has been pushed with difficulty by the post-man into your letter-boxes. You were deceived by it at first, but that was because, for various reasons, you had no opportunity of seeing what the other side had to say. Now you take it at its true value, and most of you throw it straight into the wastepaper basket. You know better than to believe that Germany is having things all her own way. You know that she is suffering far more than her Press is allowed to admit. You may admire her organisation for war, and, on paper, her *Kultur*, but you have not forgotten the way in which she has treated Belgium (and would treat you, if she ever thought fit), you have not forgotten the sinking of the ‘Lusitania,’ the ‘Arabic,’ the ‘Ancona’ and the

'Persia,' and her many other crimes against civilisation committed without any serious pretence of 'military necessity.' You know that her ambition is to rule the world with her 'mailed fist,' and you are convinced in your minds that, if she succeeded in doing so, the fate of the smaller peoples would be an unhappy one.

"When I say 'you' are convinced, I am not thinking of the professional soldiers, whose trade is war and who are always longing for 'the day' when they shall have a chance of justifying in the field the long years of discipline and dull routine which they must endure in time of peace. Nor am I thinking of those professors whose outlook on life is confined by the narrow limits of their books, who are out of touch with realities, and who are much more anxious that the facts should agree with their theories than that their theories should agree with the facts. No, I am thinking of the plain average citizen who in all countries makes up the vast majority of the population, who merely wants to be left in peace, to live happily at home with his wife and family, to cultivate his land, to look after his shop, to make what money he can and spend it on himself and those dear to him. He is the man whom I mean when I say



that 'you' are convinced that German predominance in the world would make the world unbearable. German predominance is typified by the Junker officer, the under-officer and the policeman. You know the way in which they treat their 'inferiors.' That is the way in which Germany, if she could, would treat all the other nations in the world.

"This being so, no one who knows the English could expect for a moment that they would allow German predominance if they could prevent it. Quite apart from questions of markets, which the average Englishman is inclined not only to take for granted but to leave to 'wiser heads than his own,' the determination to keep the supremacy at sea which England has won by centuries of struggle and sacrifice is at least as deeply rooted in his character as, shall I say, the love of sport. It is obvious, of course, that without sufficient sea-power to protect her trade routes England would be starved in a few weeks. For her, marine supremacy is a matter of life and death. But although the ordinary Englishman is perfectly conscious of this, or at all events remembers it when it is pointed out to him, I am inclined to think that what really inspires him

is the determination 'not to be beaten' by *anybody*.

"He has no theory on the subject. Patriotism means something quite different to him from the French idea of 'la patrie' or the German 'Deutschland über Alles.' It is, indeed, something which, like so many other expressions of sentiment, he is accustomed to keep locked up in his own breast. To strangers it often seems that he is lacking in patriotism. He certainly often says and does things which make it difficult to believe that he is really patriotic. Unlike other people, he is always inclined to understate his case. But this, in my opinion, is merely a manifestation of his curiously reserved nature, which seems to be ashamed of giving vent to its feelings, and which is continually producing fresh surprises for those who do not understand it. You are probably in the habit of considering the Englishman *cold*. You are wrong. He is not cold; he is calm and confident. What you take for absence of enthusiasm is often merely self-restraint. His insularity has produced in him a kind of remoteness, while at the same time his strenuous work in all parts of the world has taught him that the less noise one makes in 'getting things done' the less is



one's expenditure of energy. It is only, therefore, when the Englishman is very deeply moved that the patriotism in him, which is none the less real because it is restrained, expresses itself spontaneously. You do not find him boastful, as the Germans, for example, are boastful. This, also, would seem to him a waste of words. He *knows* the greatness of England. He assumes that other people know it too. It does not, therefore, seem to him worth while to talk about it.

“ Writers in the Press, authors of books, and, still more, statesmen and politicians, are in the habit of mistaking this British calm as concealing something Machiavellian and subtle. They invite their public to believe that under his mask of indifference the Englishman is a cold-blooded schemer. They represent him as plotting night and day for the destruction of his rivals in the world. This, I am convinced by long experience, is a complete mistake. The truth is that the Englishman is a dull and slow-witted fellow, very reluctant to adopt new ideas, almost incapable of seeing further than the end of his own nose. Long years of prosperity, with the comfortable habits that prosperity brings, have

made him easy-going, and in some respects inert. His education, inferior to that of many other States, has failed to arouse his imagination. He knows incredibly little of the world, in spite of the fact that he can afford better than most to travel about it. He is unable to enter into the feelings of other nations. Nor does he want to do so. To his mind, there is something *à priori* wrong about people who do not speak his language. He would admit, however, that it is nothing *seriously* wrong. It is merely a harmless eccentricity, a subject for pity rather than for blame!

“The war has changed the Englishman in this respect as it has in others. Before it is over, millions of men who have hitherto despised foreign languages will have at least a smattering of French. They will have learnt that things are not necessarily done *worse* in foreign countries because they are done *differently*. They will, in fact, have lost their insularity to some extent, and with it they will have lost something of that coldness which makes them unsympathetic to visitors on first acquaintance.

“I say ‘on first acquaintance.’ I cannot believe that anyone who has lived long enough

in England to gain a real knowledge of the people—that knowledge, I mean, which begins with a sufficient grasp of the language to enable friendships to be formed and the Englishman's 'home' to be entered without fear—will not quickly discover that the coldness which is the superficial mark of the Englishman in public covers in reality a warm and generous heart. It is part of his costume. Without it he would feel undressed, almost indecent. No one should make the mistake of supposing that it is a symptom of pride. It is really the outward expression of an innate seriousness. It is the result of the self-restraint without which it is impossible to play games as the Englishman plays them—that is, with no less respect for the spirit than for the letter of the rules.

“You know the meaning of the phrase ‘to play the game’; the German does not. He may recognize the importance of observing, for instance, the rules of duelling. But from a mere observance of rules to the idea of ‘fair play’ there is a long way to go, and even if he succeeds in forming a conception of the meaning of ‘fair play’ in games he is unable to apply it to the ordinary intercourse of mankind. The Englishman, on the other hand, learns the meaning of

'fair play' from the first moment of his joining in the games at school. He *must* 'play fair' or he will be despised by his companions as unworthy of decent society. Not only so, but when he has done any act of prowess he is careful to avoid talking of it lest he should appear boastful. In this respect he is the direct opposite of the German. I do not think I can do better than quote in this connexion the description of the Englishman at the front given by an American lady, Mrs. Rinehart, in a book named 'Kings, Queens, and Pawns,' which I happened to see in a library the other day. Mrs. Rinehart visited the front on behalf of the American Red Cross Association. She speaks of 'the English at home, restrained, earnest, determined and unassuming; the English in the field, equally all these things.' She describes them as 'Volunteers and patriots! A race incapable of a mean thing, incapable of cruelty. A race of sportsmen, playing this horrible game of war fairly, almost too honestly. A race, not of diplomats, but of gentlemen.'

" 'It is England's sense of fair play,' she continues, 'that makes her soldiers and sailors go white with fury at the drowning of women



and children and non-combatants, at the unprincipled employment of such trickery in war as the use of asphyxiating gases, or at the insulting and ill-treating of those of their army who have been captured by the Germans. It is at the English, not at the French or the Belgians, that Germany is striking in this war.'

"She quotes the German Emperor's order, dated Aix-la-Chapelle, August 19, 1914 :—

" 'It is my Royal and Imperial command that you concentrate your energies, for the immediate present, upon one single purpose, and that is that you address all your skill and all the valour of my soldiers to exterminate first the treacherous English and walk over General French's contemptible little army,'

and compares it with Lord Kitchener's order to his troops, published, by a strange coincidence, the same day and containing the following words :—

" 'The operations in which you are engaged will, for the most part, take place in a friendly country, and you can do your own country no better service than in showing yourselves in France and Belgium in the true character of the British soldier.

“‘Be invariably courteous, considerate and kind. Never do anything likely to injure or destroy property, and always look upon looting as a disgraceful act.’

“Finally, with regard to alleged English boastfulness, Mrs. Rinehart bears the following witness :—

“‘I want to say that there is very little swank (a current American word for “swagger.”) about them. The example of simplicity and genuineness has been set by the King and Queen. I met many circles of people. From the highest to the lowest, there was a total absence of the arrogance which the American mind has so long associated with the English. For fear of being thought to swagger, an Englishman will under-state his case.’

“The fact is that, as Mrs. Rinehart has discovered, the Englishman is essentially a ‘gentleman.’ He may be stupid and ill-informed; he may be slower than some other people to take advantage of his opportunities—though this accusation is often exaggerated by those who look only at outward appearances; he may be insular and consequently inclined to shyness

when confronted with foreign manners, customs and languages. But it is wrong to mistake this lack of adaptability for arrogance. When he appears rude, he is merely ignorant. He has not the slightest intention to offend, and nothing would distress him more than to be told that he has not 'done the right thing' in some unfamiliar circumstances. He *wants* to 'do the right thing.' That he is slow in perceiving the right thing to do is part of his stolid, clumsy nature. But as soon as he has realized his duty, in small matters as in great, there is no man who will perform it more conscientiously, at whatever cost. Although strongly individualistic and instinctively opposed to any kind of outside interference, he is by nature law-abiding, and he is willing to submit even to onerous restrictions as soon as he is convinced that they make for the common good. He is the easiest 'crowd' in the world to manage, as anyone can testify who has seen him in his millions on some occasion of public festivity. This man, who was supposed to be 'arrogant,' is, in fact, on the contrary, distinguished for his consideration for the rights of others. He is this, not because he has any theory on the subject, but because he has a good heart. He is considerate of others because he is a gentleman.

"A thousand witnesses have testified to the manner in which the war has given scope to the Englishman's natural kindness of heart. The French are not people who make friends easily. But, after centuries of distrust or open hostility, the French are learning how easy it is to get on with the Englishman. Millions of Englishmen of all classes are living in close contact with the French people. It is quite certain that, if they did not behave well, we should hear of it. The Germans would exploit to the utmost any story of brutality or 'arrogance,' and they have not done so. This excellence of behaviour is not due, or is only very partially due, to the fact that the army of England now in the field has in its ranks a very large proportion of men of superior education. There are plenty of well-educated men in the German army too. No, the cause is to be sought in the English character, which even in the stress of war retains its humorous good-nature. In the treatment of prisoners, also, there is no comparison between the Germans and the English. It is not because the English are fools that they have often been taken at a disadvantage during the war in the matter of new and diabolical methods such as asphyxiating gas. It is because, being gentlemen, they

intended to fight honestly and expected their adversaries to do the same. They have been disappointed, but the fact remains that, in all the more barbarous developments of warfare, the lead has come from the German side.

“No one, perhaps, need be surprised at this. The whole organisation of English life has been framed for peace. The whole object of the German organisation of life has been to prepare the people for war. When the Englishman says that he was not prepared for this war, he means—not (what is obvious) that he never contemplated the possibility of having to put in the field vast armies on the Continental scale; what he means is that his whole outlook on life was peaceful, that nothing was further from his thoughts than aggression, and that he could not realize that, because he wished to injure nobody, he did not thereby secure that nobody should wish to injure him. If he had had more imagination, he would no doubt have grasped the meaning of Germany’s military preparations, though, even so, it is unlikely that he would have roused himself from his comfortable peace-loving existence to make the efforts necessary to neutralize them. ‘Live and let live’ was his motto. So long as the Navy was there



to protect him from invasion and to maintain his trade routes safe from interference, he saw no reason for spending money on an army greater than the minimum required for the garrison and police duties of the Empire. Nothing short of a world war would have persuaded him that moments come in the history of every nation when the very existence of the nation depends on the efforts of every one of her sons, when the petty squabbles of internal politics must be forgotten, and when the 'rights' on which peacetime education has laid so much importance are as nothing compared with the 'duties' which can only be neglected at the risk of losing even the chance of exercising the 'rights.'

"Even with the war, the Englishman has been slow to shake off the habits of a lifetime, and the results of his peaceloving education. Some of the results he has not shaken off—and it is to be hoped that he never will. He has not forgotten that, however necessary, and however bracing to the spirit, war is a great evil. He has not forgotten that there is a worse thing than defeat, and that is dishonour. Without entire belief in the justice of his cause, he would never had made his present sacrifices. Still less

would the whole British Empire have rallied as one man to the mother-country in her hour of need. The Englishman might have gone to war in a moment of anger, excitement or fear, but if he had not been convinced that it was his duty, as an honest man, to keep his obligations and stand by his friends his individualism would long ago have shown itself in criticism of the kind familiar in peace. In no other war has the Englishman been less inclined to criticise his politicians and his leaders in the field. As he would express it, he and they are all in the same boat. This is a life-and-death struggle, and he means to win. At a time when the strain is beginning to tell on the others, England has barely begun to feel the effects of the war. Her wealth has, indeed, been squandered profligately, and even her vast resources will need careful husbanding, if they are to suffice for her needs and those of her Allies. But her spirit remains indomitable and unperturbed. It is never higher than in moments of adversity. Every set-back in the field is followed by a rush of recruits to the colours. In spite of her many blunders, England's spirit will lead her to victory. . . . ."

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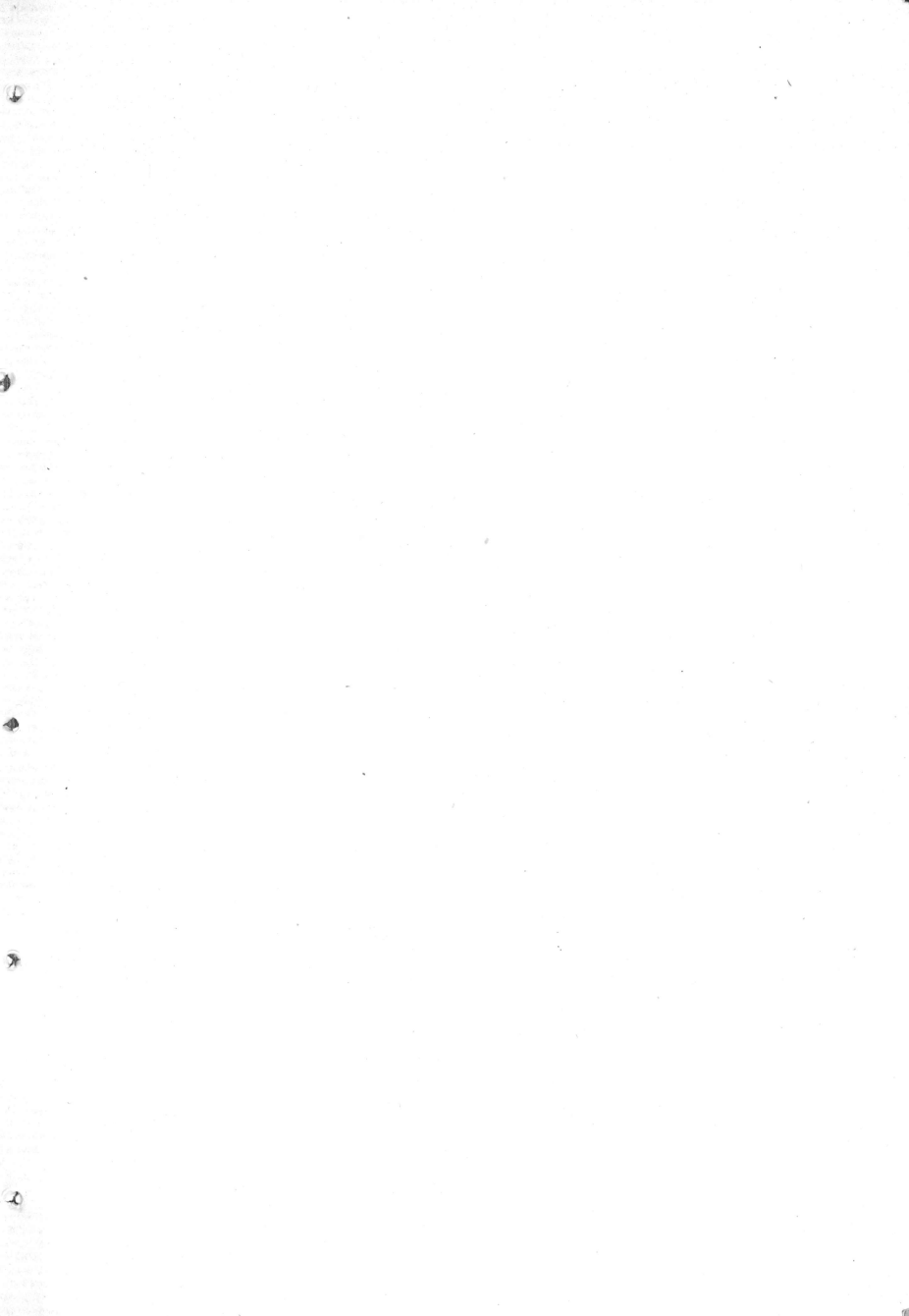
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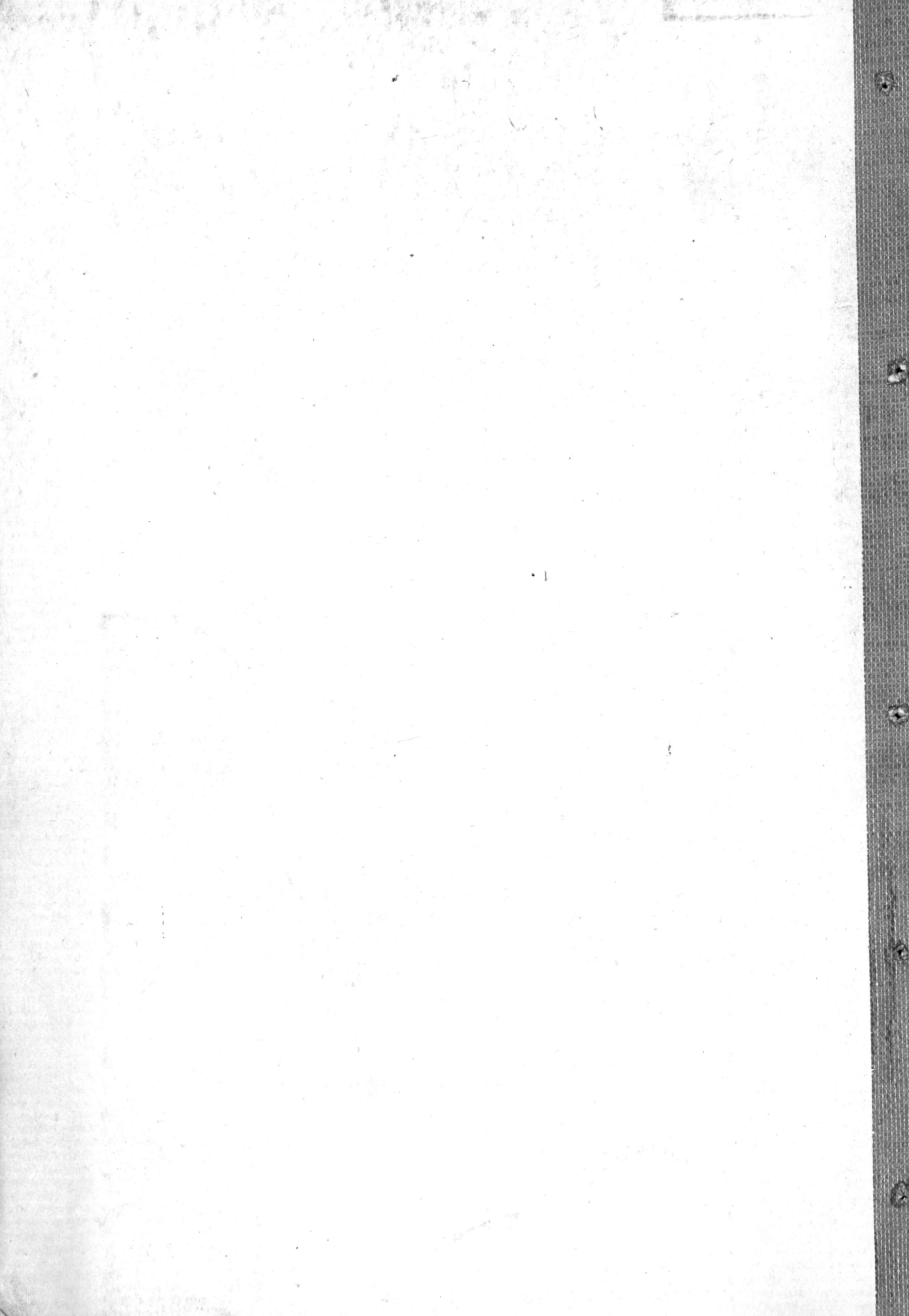
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